

Random Encounters

Spider, Spider, Burning Bright ...

By Ramon Arjona



Derrin Norellen, Fang of Lolth

Many are the traps laid by the Spider Queen. Her web is subtle, and it is immense. She has snared innumerable souls within her cunning plots. Countless others have fallen victim to her curses, trading their humanity for the power that Lolth seems to offer. Only when it is too late do they discover that the Spider Queen does not trade fairly, and that she will demand everything from a mortal in the end.

Derrin Norellen, drow rogue and illustrious adventurer, once believed himself beyond the clutches of any trap. For years he adventured in the most dangerous realms, encountering pits of lava, poisoned darts, and collapsing walls and always emerging unscathed. It was not until he found the curious gem with odd magical properties that his luck began to change.



It was a treasure horde like any other, recovered from the lair of a drow priestess and her cohorts. (He had no problems stealing from his fellow drow since he had renounced them long ago as a child.) Among the typical scrolls, coins, and potions, Derrin found a strange jewel. The party's wizard said it was certainly magic. The party's cleric told him to leave it be. Never one to err on the side of caution, Derrin ignored the cleric and set about trying to make the jewel function. After much guesswork and many failed attempts -- some of them spectacular and pyrotechnic -- he succeeded. The jewel grafted itself to his neck and refused to be removed no matter how much force he applied to it. His canine teeth began to grow larger and coarse hair began to grow on his neck.

At first, these were the gem's only effects. Derrin learned to wear shirts with high collars and smile infrequently, all the while wishing he'd paid more attention to the cleric's guidance. Then the other changes began. In the beginning, they were simple: He felt stronger and faster, and he began to have a better intuitive grasp of magic. Then his teeth changed, becoming razor sharp -- so sharp that he would often cut his lips on them. Then during a heated street battle, Derrin's jaw opened three times wider than it should have and he took a bloody chunk out of one of the thugs that was assaulting him. The other thugs beat a hasty retreat, leaving Derrin alone in the shadows.

It was all downhill from there.

Derrin fell victim to a *fang scarab*, which is a magic gem that the drow create to bolster a spider's combat prowess. By tricking it into working, Derrin caused the gem to treat him as if he were a spider. Unfortunately, besides granting him enhanced abilities and senses, the gem also began to transform him into an abominable spider-human hybrid. Far less than human now, Derrin is a pitiable mockery of the person he once was. He now exists to serve Lolth and lives like the vermin he has become.

Introducing Derrin Norellen to Your Campaign

- Children who play near the entrance to an old, abandoned mine have begun to disappear. Parents keep their young ones indoors now. The bereaved families of those who have been lost beg the PCs to search for their missing children. They have been snatched by Derrin, who is holding them prisoner with the idea of sacrificing them to Lolth in the hope of ending his curse. If the PCs do not hurry, the children are doomed.
- A strange spider stalks the city at night. Many murders and robberies are being blamed on it. The PCs are called upon to investigate. The murderer and thief is Derrin, who is taking advantage of his extraordinary abilities to make quick money. If he notices the PCs are trying to track him down, he immediately attempts to hide in the Underdark and lay low until interest has passed.
- Derrin, struggling with his curse and attempting to resist the constant whispers of Lolth, contacts one of the PCs in the hope that they can "cure" him. He finally accepts that his transformation is completely out of hand and that he needs powerful help if he is ever to regain his humanity. Since there is no known way to "cure" Derrin short of removing the fang scarab, and thus killing him, this could present a problem for the PCs -- especially since Derrin is interested in staying alive even more than he is interested in finding a "cure." Meanwhile, Derrin -- who has never had a lot of willpower -- must continue to resist the voice of Lolth, which encourages him to betray the PCs in the most horrible ways imaginable.

Derrin Norellen: Male drow Rog 7/fang of Lolth 10; CR 17; Medium-size vermin (elf); HD 7d6+21 plus 10d6+30; hp 104; Init +8; Spd 30 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 18; Atk +16 melee (1d6+4, bite) and +11 melee (1d4+2, 4 claws), or +19/+14/+9 (1d6+9/15-20, +3 *wounding rapier*) and +11 melee (1d6+2, bite) and +11 melee (1d4+2, 4 claws), or +16/+11/+6 melee (1d6+4/0, sap) and +11 melee (1d6+2, bite) and +11 melee (1d4+2, 4 claws); SA sneak attack +7d6, spell-like abilities, spider bite, *summon swarm*; SQ darkvision 120 ft., drow traits, evasion, spider

limbs, spider vision, SR 28, traps, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked), vermin traits; AL NE; SV Fort +8, Ref +16, Will +4; Str 18, Dex 19, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Balance +19, Climb +27, Hide +19, Jump +8, Listen +18, Move Silently +17, Open Lock +15, Pick Pocket +15, Search +7, Spot +7, Tumble +19, Use Magic Device +19; Alertness, Dodge, Improved Critical (rapier), Improved Initiative, Mobility, Skill Focus (Move Silently), Spring Attack.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day -- *dancing lights, darkness, faerie fire*. Caster level 17th; save DC 12 + spell level.

Spider Bite: Derrin can unhinge his jaw and bite as a natural attack that deals 1d6 points of damage. This attack does not provoke an attack of opportunity from foes. If he uses a full attack action, he can make normal weapon attacks and use his bite as a secondary natural attack at the standard -5 penalty.

Summon Swarm (Sp): Three times a day, Derrin can summon and direct an army of normal spiders to do his bidding. This ability works exactly like a *summon swarm* spell cast by a 10th-level druid, except that the swarm is always composed of spiders. Derrin can spend a move-equivalent action to direct the swarm, which moves at a speed of 30 feet.

Drow Traits: Derrin is immune to magic *sleep* spells and effects. He has a +2 racial bonus on saves against enchantment spells or effects and a +2 racial bonus on Will saves against spells or spell-like abilities. Derrin is entitled to a Search check when within 5 feet of a secret or concealed door as though actively looking for it. As a drow, he also has light blindness (blinded for 1 round by abrupt exposure to bright light, -1 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light). He also has a +2 racial bonus on Listen, Spot, and Search checks (already figured into the statistics given above).

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, Derrin takes no damage with a successful saving throw.

Spider Limbs (Ex): Derrin has two pairs of extra limbs, which emerge from the sides of his torso when needed and are fully retractable. Extending or retracting the spider limbs is a move-equivalent action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. The legs are tipped with simple claws that can hold weapons and other items normally, though they are incapable of the fine manipulation required for spellcasting or using Dexterity-based skills such as Open Lock and Pick Pocket. Despite his extra limbs, Derrin is still limited to one standard action per round. He can, however, make a secondary natural attack with each clawed leg at the standard -5 penalty as part of a full attack action. His claws deal 1d4 points of damage. If Derrin devotes two of his spider legs entirely to locomotion, his land and climb speeds each increase by 20 feet.

Spider Vision (Ex): Derrin possesses increased visual acuity in the form of a +4 competence bonus on both Spot and Search checks (already figured into the statistics noted above).

Vermin Traits: Derrin is immune to all mind-affecting effects.

Physical Changes: Derrin cannot hide his arachnoid nature without magical assistance. He is covered with insect chitin, his back hunches, his eyes are multifaceted, his skin is dark and covered with tufts of coarse, black hair, his limbs, fingers, and toes are unnaturally long, and he only has four digits on each foot and hand.

Possessions: sap, +3 rapier of wounding, fang scarab, cloak of arachnida, bag of holding (bag 4), ioun stone (dark blue rhomboid).

(The Fang of Lolth prestige class comes from the *Song and Silence* sourcebook.)

Bring the Parts Together

Although random encounters usually happen by chance, some DMs may wish to tie these five parts together into something that could lead to further adventures. Part 4 of this series will introduce some ways to tie all of these together, though you'll see some shorter methods in parts 2 and 3!

Coming in Part 2 of Spider, Spider, Burning Bright . . .

Find out more about Naradna, a drider who was once a cleric.

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